

TEMPE HISTORICAL MUSEUM  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #: OH-270  
NARRATOR: Bill LoPiano  
INTERVIEWER: Aaron Monson  
DATE: July 21, 2008

BL = Bill LoPiano

INT = Interviewer

\_\_\_\_\_ = Unintelligible

*(Italics)* = Transcriber's notes

Side A

INT: Today is July 21, 2008, and this is the Tempe Historical Museum's renovation interview with Bill LoPiano, and let's begin.

Can you start by telling me where you are originally from and how long you lived there?

BL: Most of my life was spent right here in Tempe, the majority of it. As a youngster, I lived in New England, for my formative years, basically, except for when I was away at school. And the rest of that time, of course, I spent primarily in Tempe, in my useful years.  
*(from bio: born in Massachusetts in 1926)*

INT: When did you first come to Tempe, and what made you choose here?

BL: I had classmates who were from Tempe, some were from Mesa, and we were very good friends. And they, in turn, were natives of the Tempe-Mesa-Phoenix area.  
*(from bio: arrived in Tempe in 1952)*

INT: What are some of the changes that you've seen happen in Tempe since you got here?

BL: Of growing, primarily, the increase of population. Developing the means to modernize our structures, and basically, I guess you would say that would be the nucleus of the community as it stands right now, and not much had been done.

Actually, there have been two others. The Museum was not going to be, any part of it was not going to be a Museum; it was primarily to be the Library of the community, the whole building. So that gives you an idea of the shifting around of use, space and use.

INT: How would you describe the effects of population growth in Tempe?

BL: It wasn't that dynamic, but it was sort of a steady growth, a thoughtful growth. That's primarily what I would give a statement regarding.

INT: Can you tell me a little bit about your educational background, where you went to high school and university?

BL: I went to high school in New England, different levels, different grades. And, of course, primarily came and visited some of my old classmates who have always lived in the area, in different communities—Chandler, Mesa, Phoenix, Tempe itself. And I guess you could say I grew with the community.  
*(from bio: bachelors degree from Ottawa University, and doctoral degrees from Palmer School of Chiropractic, 1951, and Los Angeles College of Chiropractic, 1953)*

INT: And what were your years of service on the City Council and as Mayor?

BL: In 1964, I was one of the members of being on the Charter Committee, that was by election, and that covered almost about a two-year period. Until that time, Tempe did not have a, shall we say, authorization to be self-administered, so to speak. And that lasted a two-year period.

Then there was a time of being encouraged to be a candidate for the City Council. And that took four years (1966-70). Then there was a time of re-election, that was another four years (1970-74). Then there was an election for the Mayoral position, and I sought the election. They were two-year terms at that time; it is now four years. And I was elected at that time; as a matter of fact, the top vote-getter (1974-78). Then, of course, I chose not to continue on. But after a hiatus, I guess you would say, of about four years, I was asked to fill a vacancy on the City Council. I had been away from anything to do with the City from an elected standpoint and serving in that capacity. So all together, I had just about almost fourteen years as a member of the City Council and Mayoral office.

INT: And I understand from reading a blurb about you, kind of a mini-biography on line, that you had also gone to chiropractic school.

BL: Yes, that was in Iowa. And that's what I meant by I was at different places.

INT: I wanted to just ask you what . . . . You were a member of the Charter Committee by election in 1964, but was there one defining moment that kind of changed your path from chiropractor, I suppose, or chiropractic practice, to public service?

BL: It sort of all melded together. No, I didn't look at it as doing one thing and forgetting everything else, because our type of government basically didn't allow for that type of service. If you wanted to serve, it would be just considered a temporary position, in a sense.

INT: You mentioned before that you were encouraged to run for City Council. What made you decide to run for Mayor?

BL: Oh, that, too, was something that . . . We were all, say, new in the idea of becoming a charter city, so to speak, so as we could give us an enabling of our community to sort of develop it ourselves, within certain limits. And, of course, the state always monitored all the communities who chose to develop a charter for themselves. I know it sounds confusing, but it really isn't.

INT: Can you describe for me a little bit the climate in the city when you first started serving on the City Council?

BL: We were growing, we were novices at it. We started developing situations of knowing we had to grow and, of course, we had to put a great deal of attention to doing that. In other words, what would be best for the city, and how do we do it? And that took time. By becoming a charter city, we were able to set in motion direction to what we wanted to become, or try to become.

INT: Can you explain to me, please, in a little bit of detail the process that involves becoming a charter city?

BL: Well, first of all, you had to—it would be very similar to if you ran for an elected office—you'd have to have so many supporting names for your candidacy, such as they have now for different offices, different levels. And then, of course, the winners get through a primary, and then there's a run-off. And it's a time-consuming position, but it's monitored by certain steps as you go along doing that.

INT: What was the biggest challenge that you faced during your time on the Council or as Mayor?

BL: Well, I had the misfortune of being involved, with all the others who were serving as either City Councilmembers or the Mayor, we had a strike by our employees that lasted about twenty-one days, about three weeks. And, of course, that sort of becomes a tearing-apart of the community. You find that many friends are lost in the process because of a position that's taken by a certain candidate, as such.

INT: How did you resolve that?

BL: I just stayed with it. Basically, we were all honest people, trying to do something for the better good of the city, so to speak.

INT: So did you have a tendency to take the side of the City workers in this case?

BL: Oh, now you're going back to the strike period. Yes, some of us did; not all of us. We had a split within our ranks. You had the regular-elected City Councilmen, and you had the Mayor's office, the mayoralty, that was a factor, too. But we got through it all.

INT: What was the biggest innovation that came out of your time as Mayor or on City Council?

BL: What do you mean by innovation? You can't . . . . It's very difficult, when you operate in this type of government, to, as one individual, say . . . . You had to, the Mayor had to, vote for or against any item or matter that was before us. In other words, it's not like, because of holding a Mayoral position, that you can do whatever you want to. And that's primarily the distinction.

INT: Well, in terms of innovation, maybe I can clear it up a little bit. Maybe it was some pivotal or progressive piece of legislation that went through, or something that happened in the City of Tempe that made it stand out amongst the other communities in the Valley?

BL: Well, in respect to what?

INT: In respect to the biggest innovation. So, basically, something that happened during your time on the Council or as Mayor that made the city stand out.

BL: Well, gosh, I can't come up with . . . . We have to go back so far. And what would seem a decisive moment to one person serving, another person serving in the same position might have a different viewpoint, and you could have difficulties that way. And so, as any guiding or voting body, the majority prevail. It depends on what the item is.

INT: Maybe we can talk a little bit about that in terms of the redevelopment of Mill Avenue, but I'd like to come back to those questions in a little while.

Is there one thing that you wish you could have accomplished serving as Mayor or on the City Council but, for whatever reason, couldn't?

BL: It's not a, shall we say, self-appointed type of position, any part of an elective office. You had a governing body of seven people, which includes the Mayor, and the Mayor has only one vote, just like any member of the City Council. However, he chairs the meeting, and he represents the city in all functions. And ultimately, you follow what the majority position would be, and you take it from there.

INT: But more specifically, was there anything that you personally wanted to pass through the Council, or any sort of legislation or ideas for city development, that . . .

BL: Yeah, you always have something, at some given time, that may not be a majority position. And so, you, like any citizen or any individual serving by the will of the people and by vote, the majority position would indicate what you would be following.

INT: Can you think of any specific examples?

BL: Of what?

- INT: Of something you wish you could have accomplished but couldn't?
- BL: You know, amazingly—I've thought about that, in a way—surprisingly, you have a group of people, and because of the method of our government, you may prevail with the majority position, and that would give you your direction as to what you will do or go or how you'll handle it.
- INT: Okay. Well, let me ask you a question about Tempe today, and answer it as best as you can from your perspective. How does the City excel when it comes to providing services to the residents and businesses? What does the City do best in that respect?
- BL: It does best by listening and trying to follow up and adopt what you hear or feel that the City should look into doing, and which may, if the majority prevails, that's the position that the City will follow. We also have an attorney who sort of guides us, but has nothing to do with decision-making of these various things.
- INT: And a similar question. What are Tempe's strengths, overall, the strengths of the community?
- BL: Of listening to the citizenry, and trying to see and attempting to do it in a timely fashion, because the people have spoken. And you give it guidance, and you try to follow it. There are always individuals who have their own agenda, so to speak. But if you're gonna have a good, open government to represent the community and its citizenry, that takes a different position. And a majority of the City Council will determine what you'll be following and doing.
- INT: And can I ask you, conversely, what you think the City's weaknesses are today, challenges that they face?
- BL: I think they have to always be cognizant that whatever they're doing or want to accomplish, that it's given proper discussion, and a putting forth of those ideas to the general citizenry, and that's what you'll do.
- INT: If we look ahead to the future—we can look ten or twenty or even almost sixty years ahead to the bicentennial of the City of Tempe in 2071—what do you think the community will look like and be like then?
- BL: If we have honorably-elected officials of the community, I would hope that they are of the type of individuals that whatever they get to or are wanting to adopt or to follow or to do, that it's always open and honest. That would be my position, but however, it must be . . . . You can't do everything, and just because one is in an elected position, that doesn't give them a carte blanche position to do whatever they want, without a proper review or a period of time.
- INT: So you're thinking in terms of honorable politicians and checks and balances?

BL: Yeah, honorable and honest, whichever you want to say.

INT: You don't feel like that's a change from how things are now? Do you believe that Tempe was and still is honorable?

BL: I think, basically. We're fortunate enough to have an honest and open government representing the community and its citizenry in whatever we want to do.

INT: And you would also feel similarly about the government being the same way back in the '60s when you were in office?

BL: Sure, absolutely.

INT: Can you relate a funny story from your time in office or on the Council?

BL: No, I never . . . . I remember people ultimately saying something like that to you, but you take it all and weigh it and evaluate it, and then you take a position.

INT: Can I ask you, then, one question about the City of Tempe during your time on the Council and as Mayor and its relationship to Arizona State University. What's your experience . . .

BL: We had a good experience. We were both growing. And sometimes it was difficult, particularly when we had to be responsible for certain, shall we say—by we, I mean the City, the City Council, who represents the City of Tempe as a governing body, the Mayor and City Council.

I think I have to go back over that. My mind is starting to jump around.

INT: Do you want me to rephrase the question?

BL: Yeah, or . . .

INT: I'd just like to ask what your personal experience is . . .

BL: Generally, we got along well with the university, in general. But at times yet, they had their own governing permissiveness, so to speak, as it went through by the various levels of government, which then we were in a different ball game, so to speak. We could do many things, but yet there are many things we couldn't do, even though we felt, well, it's our community and this is what we want to do, but yet you're still limited, because it depends. That's why it's reviewed legally.

And any one specific thing? Well, there were many things, over the period of time, that you'd like to do. Then you found that, well, you can't do it, because of the restrictions that are created through our form of government that we're allowed.

INT: Are you still involved civically with the city of Tempe? Are you in any . . .

BL: Not as much as I used to be.

INT: What kind of organizations or volunteering are you doing within the city?

BL: At the present time?

INT: Yes.

BL: Gosh, that's a hard question. You get to a point where you might try . . . Well, you would give the impression that, "How did this city ever get along without your approval?" But that's, as I said a while ago, that it took a majority position, and that's what you would follow primarily. Maybe I'm missing something in answering that.

INT: Let me pose you a different question, actually, because you did answer that a little bit before. So I want to switch gears and just talk a little bit about Mill Avenue and the redevelopment of it.

BL: Yeah. Well, we knew we were deteriorating, we were having an element come into the community. And a lot of them were young people, college-age people, many of them. And, of course, many of them lived right in Tempe proper. And a lot of them didn't; they were living here while the college was in session. And they impacted the community in respect to, what would you say, safety, rowdiness? And working with the leaders of the university, we tried to coordinate many things that we did for the betterment of the community and for the university.

INT: Can you briefly describe what Mill Avenue was like when you first came here, in the 1960s?

BL: Oh, I was here long before that, but . . .

INT: Well, when you first started serving on the Council, I should say.

BL: Yes. We were a small community, we were a quiet community. We had . . . let me indicate, let me backtrack . . . Having the caliber of the people, adults, who were students or in official offices of the university, we ultimately would, in any given item or matter or subject matter, we ultimately would get to a point where we got along, and we did what's best. Sometimes our position—by ours, I would say the City Council who represented all the city, in essence, the citizens of the community, including what the university wanted. So we had that. And we ultimately would work it out, and we would have many good things. Such as maintenance of the street, adopting, and the cleanliness of the community, and

law enforcement, we had to provide. Ultimately, the university developed their own department, legal and law enforcement. And we always, though—they never did, and still don't today, have their own fire department. That's one thing we tried to get them to take thirty, forty years ago. I'd say then that they didn't have to create a budget for it.

INT: In talking about the redevelopment of downtown Tempe, Mill Avenue, do you believe, generally, that Tempe has lost or gained as a city from the redevelopment?

BL: We gained, absolutely. Cleaned up the city. What I mean by cleaned up, the physical appearance of the community, and the way the youngsters, in essence, were protecting everybody, even the people who were creating the problems.

INT: What kind of problems, generally speaking, were happening down on Mill Avenue before it was redeveloped?

BL: Well, probably cleanliness, rowdiness, cleaning that up. And the character or type of individuals that we had to watch, so to speak, not like a . . . well, what would you say? It's a good question, and difficult to answer, because one thing would be offset by an actual happening, and other things, we probably, by being neglectful, would create another problem ourselves.

INT: I understand that in the '60s and in the '70s, immediately before the redevelopment of Mill Avenue, there was . . .

BL: The redevelopment started, actually, it was when I was in the Mayoral position. It was, what do we undertake, and how do we handle it, and what can we do at any given time, whether it involved monetary factors, or physical practices. And ultimately, we got to a point where this became routine. And for every subsequent group of offices, from that time on, it worked out fine; I think it did.

INT: One more question about the Mill Avenue redevelopment. What changes would you like to see along Mill Avenue in the next couple of years? How do you see it evolving into the future?

BL: I think we're going to have to always think of the routing of traffic, and the loitering. Primarily, we're dealing with the younger people, and then we have some outsiders who create problems for the students, to use that as a general term. And it could become a delicate thing at any time, because of attitude, there's more permissiveness today. And I think a lot of it can be good, and a lot of it is very negative.

INT: I don't have any other questions for you now about your time as Mayor and serving on the City Council. But before we end the interview, since we're on the



record, are there any final remarks or statements that you would like to make about your time serving the City of Tempe?

BL: The time that I served?

INT: Yes.

BL: Well, I think every group of offices—primarily, by offices, I mean members of the City Council—I think we're fortunate that we haven't had any big scandals as a community, as an operation. A few small things happened, but that's gonna happen anywhere, at some given point, no matter where you're located.

INT: Okay. If there's nothing else that you'd like to say on tape . . .

BL: No. Well, because every period of time, there's gonna be certain morays, societal morays, and I think most . . . And we're fortunate we're a community of education, of educators, so to speak, even though not in that sense. It's a mixed group of possibilities of what you can do or not do.

And I think we've been fortunate, considering at the present time we have what, over 50,000 students at different levels, part-time or overall, and that can be sort of a tinderbox at any time. We got through that period . . . We never had, such as the University of Arizona had, when young people were marching through the community or trying to set buildings on fire and such, that kind of thing. And we got through that all very well. We had good personnel, particularly in law enforcement, firefighting, and generally we got through it very well. And we had career people who were given the responsibility of doing certain things. As you're looking into it on your own, you probably know this.

INT: Okay. I want to thank you for your time, for coming out here, especially on short notice.

BL: Oh, gosh, it's nothing.

INT: This will conclude the Tempe Historical Museum's renovation interview with Bill LoPiano on July 21, 2008.

*(end of recording)*

Transcribed by Susan Jensen

May 2013

U:\CommunityServices\MUSEUM\OH Transcriptions\OH-270 LoPiano, Bill.docx